

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

The Correlation Between Education and Incarceration Among Black Males

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Social Work

By

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May 2016

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## Abstract

### The Correlation Between Education and Incarceration Among Black Males

By

Heather Turner

Master of Social Work

Mass housing/incarceration has become a systemic problem in our society that the researchers believe can be solved through educational attainment. The researchers believe that individuals with lower levels of educational attainment are housing/incarcerating more than the general population. This study attempts to shed light on existing data collected from the American Survey, 2008-2012 [United States]: Public. The researchers' ultimate goal is to determine if there is a correlation between educational attainment and incarceration among African Americans in the United States. The goal of this research is to begin to shed light on the importance of education in our society to help other researchers begin a dialogue surrounding education as a tool to defer housing/incarceration in our society. The researchers found indications that there is a significant difference between educational attainment and housing/incarceration within the African American population. The researchers hope that this insight will help other researchers explore education and help determine through further studies that education should be funded and not defunded as it constantly is, in our lower socioeconomic communities.

## SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION

Mass incarceration is a term that has been coined in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in response to the overwhelming increase in the prison population within the United States. Since 1980, the prison population has expanded from 500,000 to 2.3 million people in just three decades, not including the number of people who are living outside of prison but still within the correctional system under parole or probation supervision (Hawkins, 2010). African Americans constitute nearly 1 million persons of the total 2.3 million incarcerated (Hawkins, 2010).

Mass incarceration is a hot topic among politicians, human rights activists, educators, and news journalists. This carceral phenomenon is being described by some as a crisis in America that offers opportunity for the wealthy to profit off of socially marginalizing poor people and families, by others as a necessary evil in order to deter and incapacitate criminals, and lastly, there is a functionalist movement in America that is comparing mass incarceration to Jim Crow as a means of controlling minorities, in particular African American and Latino males, by subjugating this population while increasing social inequality (Wildeman, 2012). While the consequences and causes of mass incarceration are under much scrutiny and debate, the question of prevention and deterrence of acquiring time behind bars for young African American males seems plausible and necessary since this is the population most affected by the prison boom. There is research suggesting that education is the answer.

In modern times, arriving at adult status involves first moving from school to work, then to marriage, to establishing a home and becoming a parent (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Completing this sequence without delay promotes stable employment, marriage, and other positive life outcomes such as freedom, both figuratively and physically. However, like many structural systems in America, the early education system is also affected by inequities. Poor children generally receive inferior services from schools and agencies that are located in the inner

city (Noguera, 2003). Some schools are sites where African American males endure their first experiences of being marginalized, stigmatized, arrested and even detained in juvenile correction facilities.

In the article, *Just as Bad as Prisons* written by Q. Allen and K. White-Smith, the authors stated, “There is evidence showing the connection between the punitive practices and restrictive culture of the public school system and the prison system, which focuses on criminalization rather than education and rehabilitation”. In inner city public school systems across America Black males are more likely to be labeled with behavior problems, as less intelligent, and more likely to be punished with severity for violating minor school rules (Noguera, 2003). High quality instruction is a rare find in inner-city schools as well as teachers that are trained to be compassionate towards and understand the cultural and environmental factors that minority students are struggling with day to day. Inner city youth are faced with exposure to violence, crime, drugs, and often lack parental guidance due to living with a single parent that works extensive hours. Many Black male adolescents find themselves dropping out of high school or only finishing high school and not continuing higher education (Noguera, 2003). The researchers of this paper aim to answer the questions, are African American males over represented in the institutionalized group quarter system due to the lack of access to a quality education in inner city communities? Does higher education indicate lower institutionalized group quarter rates?

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the correlation between education and incarceration among African American males. The researchers of this paper will utilize the term institutionalized and non-institutionalized group quarters as a substitute for the term incarceration. This was done because the U.S. Census utilizes this term and incorporates all institutionalized group quarters as facilities for people under formally authorized supervised care or custody which includes correctional facilities, nursing facilities, psychiatric hospitals, group homes for juveniles and residential treatment centers for juveniles.

This topic is significant because currently society continues to reinforce stereotypes and prejudices through media and television that depict Black males, in particular, as innately criminal, intellectually inferior, and deserving of maltreatment by officers in authority and ultimately housed in institutionalized group quarters by the criminal judicial system. If this problem of mass incarceration can be directly linked to lack of quality education, we as social workers need to advocate for more quality education and programs that promote higher learning, assist in educating teachers in urban areas in regard to race-relations and the effects of the intersectionality of cultural, familial, and environmental factors, that can contribute to the bio-psycho-social support of black males in order to deter the experience of becoming housed in institutionalized group quarters.

## SECTION 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the current events of today, we must understand the history of events. It is a historical fact that Black people in America were treated as products for labor, were owned like cattle, and were stripped of their human right to be educated, free, and thrive during the 245 years that slavery existed in North America. African Americans have historically endured countless struggles and yet perilously overcame various obstacles in the fight for human civil rights. From the abolishment of slavery in 1865 to the elimination of public education segregation on a state and local level in 1964, many would naively surmise that the African American community that demanded equality has finally accomplished it. After all, America even has a black president. However, what many don't understand is that while obvious and easily recognizable racism has ended, discrimination of Black people has been veiled and embedded in the fabric of the systems that operate America. The problem of mass incarceration can be traced back to two basic shifts in politics and economics dating back to 1965 (Western & Wildeman, 2009). The 1960's were a time of great loss and anguish for the African American community. One of the most prolific and powerful leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century named Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965, and shortly thereafter the Watts riots commenced in response to police racism and brutality. The African American community revolted against the criminal justice system by reacting in outrage and began rioting in many states throughout America. White people were growing uneasy due to the civil unrest and racial violence, in response, the Republican campaign of 1964 began linking the problem of street crime to civil rights protest (Western & Wildeman, 2009). In response to the urban riots in Los Angeles, New York, Detroit and other cities Republican governors and legislators increased their legislative representation for mandatory minimum sentences, sentence enhancements for repeat offenders, and expanded prison



capacity (Western 2006; Jacobs & Carmichael 2001). Shortly thereafter, another massive blow to the unity of the community and the progression of civil rights activism hit when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968. From 1969 to 1979 the African American community suffered a great economic loss, the urban deindustrialization eroded the labor market for unskilled low educated young Black men while punitive politics simultaneously gained momentum (Western & Wildeman, 2009). During this time, over 350,000 manufacturing blue-collar jobs were lost. For young black men in metropolitan areas, employment rates fell by 30 percent among high school dropouts and 20 percent among high school graduates. The influx of drugs in the 1980's, which some believe to have been sanctioned by the US government (CIA), created the perfect storm; an avenue for displaced, poor, and uneducated black men in the ghetto to take advantage of an opportunity to acquire wealth by selling drugs, as well as supply a new highly addictive drug for substance abusers to consume that lived in these impoverished communities. While this may not have been an ideal option, for many it was a tempting and appealing way to quickly put food on the table during an economic crisis within the community. By the 1990's Democrats had also become tough on crime. This was illustrated by the Clinton Crime Bill, which allocated \$9.9 billion for prison construction and added life terms for third-time federal offenders. These new laws were locked in place just in time for the declaration of the idealized "War on Drugs" during the Reagan administration. Black drug dealers and addicts were funneled into the institutionalized group quarter system and remained there for many years due to harsh sentences that had been newly implemented.

The fore-mentioned chain of events throughout multiple decades commenced the prison boom, otherwise known as mass housing/incarceration. Variation in imprisonment was closely linked to variation in wages during the 1980's and 90's. Variation in wages is closely linked to varying levels of education (Noruega, 2003). Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, authors of *The Black Family and Mass Incarceration*, cumulated a report correlating the percentage of

Blacks incarcerated during the years of 1980 and 2000 and their levels of education. They found that lifetime risks of imprisonment are steeply stratified by education. The authors state, “At the very bottom of the education distribution, among high school drop-outs, prison time has become extraordinarily prevalent. For Black male dropouts born since the mid-1960’s, 60 to 70 percent go to prison. For this very poorly schooled segment of the population, serving time in prison has become a routine life event on the pathway through adulthood” (Western & Wildeman, p.231).

There are two main theories that can be used to explain the problem of mass housing/incarceration and the possible correlation to education attainment. Simply put, structuralists argue that people are products of their environment. Structuralist theory would explain high drop out rates as being social consequences of inequality. Similarly, high rates of incarceration within a community would likely be due to lack of availability of jobs and economic opportunities, class structure, and political economy. Alternatively, Culturist theory explanations of behavior focus on the moral codes that operate within families, communities, or groups. For example, Black males may exhibit self-destructive and self-defeating behavior derived from community based “folk theories” that stem from the long history of discrimination against Black people that has created a cultural belief that no matter how hard one works they will never reap rewards equivalent to Whites (Wildeman, 2012). A combination of both theories, accompanied with individual traits of resilience and determination, may be a plausible reason for the possible correlation of educational attainment and mass housing/incarceration. However, the researchers of this paper lean more toward the structuralist theory as an explanation because research shows this leap in incarceration of disadvantaged black men during these years does not seem to be solely due to crime, in fact, “Survey data show that poor male youth were much less involved in crime during the prison boom, in 2000, than in its inception, in 1980. To explain the growing risk of imprisonment over time, the role of policy is decisive” (Western & Wildeman, p.225). It seems as though the foundation of a life of freedom and the progression to securing the markers of

adulthood; i.e. education, employment, and establishment of home and family (Allen & White-Smith, 2014), are for black boys greatly engrained in the ability to receive a quality education, without it, the trap made by policy, law, and legislature is set up to incarcerate the uneducated poor. There is a systemic component to the problem of mass housing/incarceration that may add more complexity to the idea that quality education alone will prevent high levels of incarceration of black males.

### **Contemporary views on correlation between mass housing/incarceration and educational attainment**

Movements like Black Lives Matter and some scholars, speakers, and writers like Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, are offering a new perspective to the current crisis of mass incarceration by explaining it as a new legal form of slave labor, and the purposeful creation of a second-class citizen that legally does not have the civil right to vote, to receive financial aid for education or welfare, and is discriminated against for employment. Contemporary perspectives also explain schools currently being legally segregated by residential zoning rather than historical legal racial segregation. Again, policy contributes to the inequity of education in America, creating another systemic component to the problem of low quality education. This allows school systems to act as colorblind institutions while maintaining racial inequalities through vastly under-resourced schools (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Schools in urban areas are under constant monitoring and surveillance by police; even metal detectors are stocked at the entrance of some schools, creating the feel of a penal environment rather than one conducive to education. The intersection of teacher biases, misinterpretations of black male behaviors, and disciplinary policies (zero tolerance), contribute to the overrepresentation of black males in school suspensions and expulsions (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). Furthermore, Black boys attending school with increased police presence on campus are much more vulnerable to punitive actions that place

them directly under police custody, and into the school-to-prison pipeline (Nolan & Willis, 2011). Alternatively, schools in affluent predominantly White neighborhoods are less surveilled by police, grounds are well kept and classrooms are supplied with state of the art electronics for students to utilize while learning, students are supported by teachers, social workers, psychologists, counselors, principals, nurses, and more staff that are available to care for their bio-psycho-social needs. The environment fosters learning, growth, and confidence, and expectations are high for students to continue their education after graduation, in fact programs are set in place to expose students to college campuses and aid in completing college applications. The experiential difference between schools in the inner city and suburban schools is undeniable and unfair and is hypothesized to be positively linked to the over representation of Black males in the prison system.

### **SECTION 3**

#### **HYPOTHESIS**

The researchers hypothesize that higher education will promote lesser-institutionalized group quarter inhabitation for the black male population.

## **SECTION 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is an exploratory study using secondary data collected from the American Community Survey (ACS), 2008-2012 [United States]: Public. The researchers goal is to determine if there is a correlation between educational attainment and group institutionalized group quarters among African Americans in the United States. The researchers will utilize secondary data from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The secondary data from the American Community Survey, 2008-2012 [United States]: Public; was gathered by, the United States Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census. Additionally, the data gathered was a 5 year public use micro data sample (PUMS) for 2008-2012, a subset of the 2008-2012 ACS sample which roughly sampled 124,023 cases per year. For the purpose of this study the researchers analyzed 404 cases from the 124,023 total cases of existing data pertaining to educational attainment and institutionalized group quarters among African-Americans in attempt to highlight any correlation that may exist among the variables.

## SECTION 5

### PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENTS

The American Community Survey (ACS) consists of a housing unit (HU) sample, which addresses the residents of group quarters (GQ) facilities. The ACS provides data on economic, housing and social characteristics for demographic groups covered in the United States. The researchers looked at characteristics in the secondary data pertaining to the independent variable educational attainment, and the dependent variable of group quarter/incarceration among African Americans. Educational attainment specifically referred to the highest degree of education an individual has completed. Educational attainment data ranged from no school no high school diploma, regular high school diploma, GED or alternative credential, some college less than a year, 1 or more years of college credit, Associate degree, Bachelors degree, Master Degree, professional degree beyond a Masters degree, to Doctorate degree. For the purpose of this research, the term institutional group quarters was utilized as a proxy to measure and capture the incarceration variable. Institutional group quarters as defined by the United States Census included, facilities for people under formally authorized supervised care or custody at the time of interview, such as correctional facilities, nursing facilities/skilled nursing facilities, in-patient hospice facilities, mental (psychiatric) hospitals, group homes for juveniles, and residential treatment centers for juveniles.

Originally, data was collected by computer-assisted interviews (CAPI), computer telephone interviews (CATI), and mailed questionnaires. The researchers plan to utilize a Chi Square test. These tests are designed to find an association between variables and also assists in describing the relationship. In this study we will be specifically looking at the following variables; educational attainment, institutionalized group quarters, and non-institutionalized group quarters as it pertains to the racial demographic of African-Americans and Whites. For data

analysis procedure the researchers plan to utilize SPSS or the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

The initial data for this study was provided by the American Community Survey (ACS) and came in a Microsoft Excel Format. 124,023 cases were then exported to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 23, which allowed for the ability to sort through specific variables in order to create the data set of 404 that led to the target racial demographic for this study. Once the data was processed, educational attainment variable was recoded from a continuous variable to a categorical variable in order to place the target population into less than high school diploma, high school diploma, and college education in order to utilize the Chi Square Test. Chi Square test enabled the researchers to explore the relationship between three categorical variables; educational attainment, institutionalized group quarters, and non-institutionalized group quarters. This method was chosen, because the data consisted of all categorical variables. The SPSS spreadsheet was condensed into four columns and various rows to accommodate the data.



## SECTION 6

### RESULTS

After running the analysis to determine the association between educational attainment and institutionalized group quarter homes, the data was analyzed with a Chi Square test. Table 1 results indicate that there is a significant difference between educational attainment and group quarter homes within the African American population.

*Group Quarter Home by Educational Attainment*

		Educational Attainment				
			Less Than High School Diploma	Diploma Or Equivalent	College	Total
Group Quarter Home	Institutionalized	N	50	59	76	185
		%	58.1%	50.9%	37.6%	45.8%
	Non- institutionalized	N	36	57	126	219
		%	41.9%	49.1%	62.4%	54.2%
Total	N		86	116	202	404
	%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*Note.*  $\chi^2 = 11.913^*$ ,  $df = 2$ , Cramer's  $V = .172$

\* $p < .05$

Sample Table 1 illustrates the positive correlation between college education and lower institutionalized group quarter home encumbrance. This finding was in congruence with the researchers hypothesis that higher education would in fact decrease the amount of time spent in institutionalized housing among African American males. Upon further analysis of the sample table, researchers found an almost equivalent percentage of persons institutionally housed among

African American male high school graduates. This was surprising to researchers although it could possibly be explained by the fact that a high school diploma is not considered higher education. A high school diploma is bare minimum to enter the work force and without special training trade skills or a college degree one is not eligible for many higher paying employment positions. Through reading articles pertinent to the topic, the researchers have discovered that while higher education is a deterrent to incarceration, poverty is still a strong factor associated with entry into the institutionalized group quarter system, this may explain why the percentages of high school and non-high school graduates is comparable. Lastly, the percentage of non-high school graduates institutionalization was greater than the non-institutionalized persons. This finding was also consistent with the researchers hypothesis that less education would lead to more incarceration among African American males.

## **SECTION 7**

### **DISCUSSION**

All throughout the United States of America there are hundreds of school programs whose funding and access to resources are cut annually. The findings in this paper help open a dialogue about the importance of education in our urban communities; where a significant number of African Americans reside. It is the researchers hopes that individuals will begin to see that our educational institutions can serve as a deterrent from jails, institutions, and even death. Politicians often speak of finding innovative ways to fight the mass incarceration issue in our country; and in those proclaimed attempts have defunded schools throughout the nation perpetuating the problem they are trying to combat. The research done coupled with the researchers findings also suggest that educational institutions throughout the United States can potentially offer students more than a school to prison pipeline. Higher education can offer less likelihood of incarceration and can provide more opportunity for gainful employment after completion. However, poverty plays an important role in the problem of low quality educational attainment within urban communities. The cycle of poor youth converting into poor prisoners is one that cannot be solved without not only investing in equal education for all American children regardless of their socioeconomic status but also changing the expectation of their future from negative to positive.

## **SECTION 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, due to the fact that the research utilized group quarter homes as a proxy for incarceration, the study was limited in that the term group quarter homes captured incarceration and other forced detentions like mental health hospitals, jails, and juvenile group homes. Moreover, another concluding limitation to this study was due to the researchers deciding to condense educational attainment into three categories; by doing so the data lost its richness. The researchers also found a weak relationship with the Cramers  $v$ ; which gauges the strength of the data's relationship.

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## Appendix A: Graphs

### Crosstabs

**Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Group_Quarter_Home * Educational_Attainment	404	100.0%	0	0.0%	404	100.0%

*Group Quarter Home by Educational Attainment*

		Educational Attainment				
			Less Than High School Diploma	Diploma Or Equivalent	College	Total
Group Quarter Home	Institutionalized	n	50	59	76	185
		%	58.1%	50.9%	37.6%	45.8%
	non- institutionalized	n	36	57	126	219
		%	41.9%	49.1%	62.4%	54.2%
Total		n	86	116	202	404
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%



Here there is higher percentage of A.A who have less than a high school diploma are 58% institutionalized compared to 41% of non, 50% institutionalized vs. not which are 49 % and looking at someone with college it is 37% compared to non-institutionalized which is 62.4%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.913 <sup>a</sup>	2	.003
Likelihood Ratio	11.965	2	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.604	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	404		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 39.38.

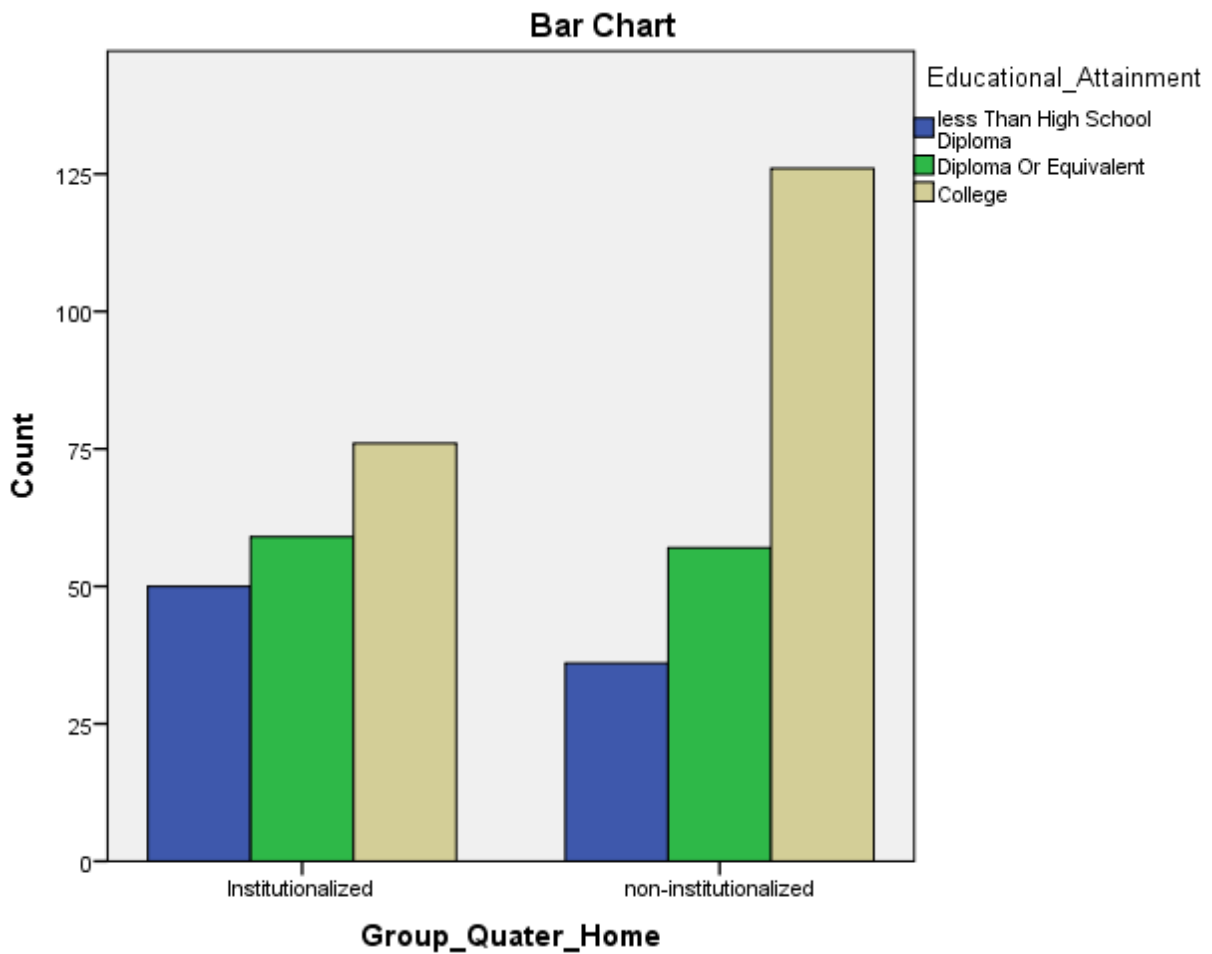
The researchers looked at Pearson because the assumptions were met and not validated.

The chi-square shows a statistically significant difference between group quarter home housing (institutionalized and non-institutionalized) and the three educational attainment levels

**Symmetric Measures**

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.172	.003
	Cramer's V	.172	.003
N of Valid Cases		404	

We look at Cramer's V because we are using nominal data only this indicates that there is a weak relationship.



This just shows how the two lower levels of educational attainment compared to the other two lower levels in non-institutionalized data are more likely to be institutionalized compared to having a higher education and being non-institutionalized.

## APPENDIX G: ADDENDUM

The Correlation Between Education and Incarceration Among Black Males is a joint graduate between Dario Tejada and Heather Turner.

This document will explain the division of responsibilities between the two parties.

Dario Tejada is responsible for all the following tasks:

- Downloading Data from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research
- Review and completion of Analysis
- Review and completion of Hypothesis
- Review and inputting Graphs
- Review and complete limitations

Heather Turner is responsible for all the following tasks:

- Integration of information within Literature Review as it pertained to topic
- Review and completion of Concluding correlating findings
- Review and completion of Procedures and Instruments by utilizing ACS
- Editing and inputting paper into APA and Graduate Study submission format
- Completion of introductory paragraph introducing Cap Stone topic

Both parties shared responsibilities for the following tasks/document sections:

- Conduct research to help support the literature review
- Clean data and run SPSS analysis
- Reviewing analyzed data
- Creation of Abstract
- Completion of Results
- Methodology
- Editing

<b>Heather Turner</b>	Date	<b>Dario Tejada</b>	Date
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